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AUTHOR Daresh, John C.
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ABSTRACT

Greater attention is now being directed at issues associated with the professional development of new school leaders. This paper identifies some of the major concerns of beginning school leaders across different nations, some of which include needs for knowledge about basic managerial skills, adequate socialization to the job, and a sense of self. The paper offers directions for future research: (1) studies of school-reform proposals (such as centralized assessment, new demands to work with political bodies, and open enrollment) and their relationship to beginners' needs; (2) changing societal issues and their impact on beginning principals; and (3) an increased focus on the professional development of school leaders. (LMI)

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RESEARCH ON BEGINNING SCHOOL LEADERS:

WHERE DO WE GO NEXT?

by

John C. Daresh
Professor and Chair
Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations
The University of Texas at El Paso
El Paso, TX 79968
(915) 747-7592
e-mail: jdaresh @utep.edu

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RESEARCH ON BEGINNING SCHOOL LEADERS:

WHERE DO WE GO NEXT?

Studies of beginning principals, such as the ones reported in the other papers presented as part of this symposium, were relatively rare only a few years ago. At least two possible explanations account for this paucity of scholarship. One may be that there simply was not a lot of turnover in the principalship (or headship, or directorship, or whatever term is given to the leader in an individual school across the world), and as a result, there was not a lot of practical or scholarly interest in looking at relatively rare events (i.e., new people stepping into leadership roles). Another potential reason for little research on beinning building leaders might be found in scholarly or institutional biases against doing anything but theory based (either theory -building or theory-testing) analyses. In this regard, many researchers were dissuaded from doing anything so mundane as looking at problems and concerns of novice practitioners. After all, research quality was based largely on one's ability to study issues of a more conceptual nature. Academic careers and advancement are often grounded in review the esoteric rather than the practical.

Regardless of the reasons why studies of the needs of beginning principals may have been rare in the past, the past is that, in more recent times, research on subjects such as this have been not only more frequent, but in fact, studies related to the improvement of practice have now become considerably more fashionable. It is now acceptable to look into concerns of "how to" administer and lead. In the United States, England, South Africa, Kenya, and numerous other nations, there is a clear realization that school leadership is a critical part of school improvement. As a result, finding ways to assist those who first step into leadership roles in education are of central value to more effective practice. Esoterica has now been replaced by other values. And so we now have more attention paid to "how" principals are prepared. If one doubts this statement, all that must be done is to review the content of the programs of such research meetings as the University Council for Educational Administration and the American Educational Research Association. Even a brief review of the papers presented at such conferences will show that greater attention is now being directed to issues associated with the professional development of school leaders. That includes the concerns and needs of new principals.

What Do We Know?

The research conducted on the needs, interests, and concerns of those who are now coming on board as individual school building leaders, regardless of the nationin which the research is conducted, has been remarkably consistent in its findings:

1. Beginning principals, heads, or whatever term is used to describe site level leaders, indicate frustration over not knowing as much as they believe they should know about basic technical managerial skills. *(People express a desire to know more about such issues as budgeting, how laws impact on leadership, personnel management issues, and so forth).*

2. Beginning school site leaders wish that they had less difficulty in becoming socialized to their new roles and responsibilities. *(There is so much to learn about leadership, and at the same time, people express a desire to "fit in" with their new colleagues and organizational settings).*

3. An appreciation of one's personal values, ethical orientation, and vision of what is possible and desirable for the school is absolutely essential. *(Having a sense of "self" is critical).*

While all three of these issues appear in studies of beginers carried out in a variety of settings, the third area--knowledge of personal values and

ethical stances--appears at the center of all research. Whether the beginning leader is in the US, the UK, Kenya, or South Africa, we have a strong case for assuming that effective leadership will emerge when individuals have a clear definition of their own interpretation of being designated as the leader.

What's Next?

The nature of the knowledge base related to needs and interests of beginning school leaders is now relatively well-documented. Now, the issue must be to decide what potential issues may be explored in future analyses of in this area. We are now at a point that is close to simply conducting more and more studies to learn more and more about less if we do not cast our eyes toward appreciating the ways in which educational practice may now call for new rounds of research on beginning principals and others.

Some of the directions that future research on beginning school leaders may take include the following:

1. **Studies of school reform proposals and their relationship to beginners' needs.**

The past ten to fifteen years have seen an enormous group of proposed changes in the ways in which schools are to be governed inthe future. Consider, for example, the kind of wholesale educational changes which have been mandated across the United Kingdom since 1988 with the

enactment of the Reform Act (Mclure, 1992). Here, such issues as site-based management, open enrollment, greater citizen "grass roots" involvement in school governance, the use of vouchers. and centralized curriculum and evaluation are no longer "trends" in education. They have set the standard for daily practice and life in the schools of England, Scotland, and Wales. In the United States, mandated change has used much of the same rhetoric, but change in itself has not been nearly as dramatic and swift because of the fact that reform occurs on a state-by-state basis.

Centralized Assessment. Regardless of the specific reform and renewal identified in any country, the fact remains that all change will impact fundamental behaviors and practices by educators. Teachers will (and now do) teach differently and with new politically-honed sensitivities because of the impact on instruction brought about by accountability derived from centralized assessment schemes. There are new pressures which have been placed on educators to make certain that "test scores are up." No longer is standardized testing seen as one of many indicators for determining student achivement in a school, but practices such as the national tests administered in the United Kingdom each year and statewide achievement testing used in most of the United States now create a climate wherein educators are often understood as the "targets" of testing, not the

children. Student achievement testing has been transformed from a diagnostic process to provide formative feedback to teachers so that they may help students to learn, to a kind of massive summative assessment of whether or not teachers and administrators are effective, or even competent. If this were not true, league tables of school performance on national tests would not be published in England each year, and there would be little talk of how to "reconstitute schools" with low test scores taking place across the United States.

What this new emphasis on public accountability derived from standardized testing means is that those stepping into teaching or managerial positions must now be ready to address new expectations (and stress) that will come from public scrutiny of scores. What this means for researchers is that, as new principals come on board in settings where testing procedures are so important, the effect of that kind of pressure and demand on novice leaders needs to be documented. Simply stated, the job of the principal (or headteacher) is different from what it was just a few years ago, in large measure based on the assumption that principals are responsible for maintaining sufficiently high test scores.

New demands for working with political bodies. Another aspect of educational reform, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United

States, involves the need for school personnel to become politically active with regard to community and parent organizations. In the UK, local school management, where each school has its own board of governors, is now a legally-mandated practice across the country. Governors are community representatives, generally coming from the ranks of non-educators These groups are empowered to engage in all aspects of determing policy and practice in each individual school building. They control budget, and they make decisions related to personnel selection.

In the US, an increasing number of statesnow require that each school have some type of lay group working with the staff of the school. In Texas, for example, Campus Improvement Teams (CITs) are mandated. In the majority of cases, the roles and responsibilities of such groups are not as powerful as the English groups. For example, they control considerably less money, and as a result, rarely have direct involvement in personnel management. (These matters generally are retained by districtwide boards of education). Nevertheless, lay community involvement in individual schools has been increased. As a result, the US principal, like his or her British counterpart, must be more concerned with interactions with governance matters.

Open enrollment. In the US and UK, students are able increasingly to select schools at large. Traditional requirements that students must stay within a particular cachement or attendance area are disappearing. Again, the British system is considerably beyond US policy in this matter because the concept of free selection and open enrollment is a nationally-mandated practice. In the US, such policy is still controlled by state or even local board policy.

Regardless of how far the practice of open enrollment has gone in particular settings, however, the critical matter is that it changes considerably the role of the school-based leader.

These are but three examples of mandated reform practice which have had a significant impact on the image, duties, and responsibilities of individual principals or headteachers. Future research on the needs, interests, and practices of beginners, therefore, need to take into account a wide array of pressures, expectations, and mandated responsibilities which now have an effect on building leaders in ways that are considerably different than their predecessors. The image of the headteacher being "one of the teachers" in a school is virtually gone across England, for example. Gone, too, are days when the US principal could refer many issues to the

central office. When people assume these roles now, they are likely to need different forms of support than they would have in the past.

2. Changing societal issues and its impact on the role of beginners.

Practices in schools automatically reflect practices in the surrounding social environment. (And of couse, the argument may be made that the reverse is also true). But the fact is that, when issues such as the US Civil Rights movement are considered in society in general, schools must also reflect that reality. In developing nations such as Kenya and South Africa, matters of social change are not events but consistent realities of daily life. As these, and other nations across the globe where individuals and groups fromerly separated from prevailing power structures are now seeking their rightful place in society, schools are also pressed into new visions and practices. Consider, for example, where four school systems of considerably unequal power and influence traditions are now integrated into single provincial educational systems in which pupils from all groups are brought together in schools.

The impact on school leaders is enormous when major social change occurs outside the schoolhouse gates. It is impossible to believe that schools may somehow be unaffected by issues and trends which occur elsewhere. In emerging nations, this results in different ways of working with very

different cultures and social norms, and also different community and parental expectations. It may also mean that the school leader must be ready to deal with multiple language expectations. In the US, this generally means that many school administrators are now experiencing a great influx of pupils now speaking Spanish. In South Africa, where more than 16 languages serve as the "official language" of the nation, the issue becomes even more complex.

Again, these issues serve as the basis for changing expectations for headteachers and principals. Our research on the needs of beginning school leaders has typically looked at broad issues associated with the effective operation of an individual school. In more and more cases, however, the role of the principal is one that takes on societal responsibilities; the principal is at the center of much larger change. As a result, studies of what novice administrators encounter will need to ask questions related to social issues faced by the administrator. The research carried out in South Africa by van der Westhuizen and Legotlo is consistent in this regard when they have looked at issues faced by White South African principals, as compared with Black colleagues. Their next steps will no doubt look quite carefully at the needs of principals representing tribal and linguistic groups across the

country. As this work proceeds, it shall serve as a kind of model for the work which needs to be carried out in a variety of settings across the world.

3. Increased attention focused on the professional development of school leaders.

Kirkham's description of the emergence of mandated training for school headteachers in the United Kingdom points to yet another development which must be acknowledged in the next generation of studies on beginning school leaders. In the United States, there is a long history of mandated, formal preservice training required before school principals are able to assume their first positions. However, recent analyses of this preservice preparation show that the majority of programs are not addressing the need to enable principals and other school leaders to walk into their first administrative posts with the requisite knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values that will enable them to have positive impact on student learning. As a result, numerous innovative approaches have been developed and implemented in recent years. Researchers who would look at the needs and interests of beginning school principals would do well to examine the kinds of experiences these individuals had before stepping into their jobs. Where they prepared in programs that are generally described as

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weak or inspired? If so, would anyone be surprised to note that graduates feel unready to assume leadership positions.

In England, the arrival of such practice as the National Professional Qualifications for the Headship (NPQH) suggest that future studies of novice headteachers will need to be sensitive to whether or not the beginners went through a planned program of study such as the one described by Kirkham, or were merely placed into their roels in the traditional fashion followed by English headteachers: they proceeded "up the ranks" from classroom teacher to head of grade level, to member of senior management, to deputy, then finally head. Or did they actually engage in a professional development program in addition to the apprenticeship model which has been used so extensively in the past?

Issues associated with formal training of administrators may not be quite as central to discussions of school leadership in Kenya or South Africa. But the research reported by Wa Kitavi and others in this symposium shows that matters associated with formal, successful entrance into site leadership are worth further study. As other concerns facing African school administrators are addressed, it is quite likely that researchers can also investigate the impact of preservice professional development on leaders in these settings.

Summary

In this paper, some of the major issues which have been identified as central concerns to beginning school leaders in many different nations were identified. It was noted that, to date, there are probably far more similarities than differences found among researchers in different parts of the world. However, the purpose here was not simply to note overlaps, but rather think about some of the future research which may be conducted. Specifically, it is assumed that many issues facing education in general in many different nations are likely to have a direct effect on the nature of findings of further research on beginning site leaders of schools.

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